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CIA-financed professor to quit center

Harvard is also faulted in report

By Richard Higgins
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The director of Harvard's Center for Middle Eastern Studies will resign that post as a result of an investigation of his handling of Central Intelligence Agency funds supporting his scholarly work, according to an official university report.

However, the report by A. Michael Spence, dean of the faculty of arts and sciences, concludes that the university was also at fault for not taking action after professor Nadav Safran informed it of a CIA contract supporting his work. The contract contained conditions that, Spence concludes, may have violated Harvard's rules on sponsored research.

The case caused concern over the issue of CIA financing for scholarly research earlier this year after disclosures that Safran had accepted, but not disclosed, more than \$45,000 from the CIA to finance a conference on Islamic fundamentalism held at Harvard's Faculty Club in October. It was later learned that he had also accepted \$107,000 in CIA funds for a book on Saudi Arabia published this year, without disclosing it publicly.

Spence's report, a copy of which was obtained by The Globe, says that "the problem of disclosure of the conference contract may have caused a loss of confidence in the [Middle Eastern Studies] center and in the university's ability to follow effectively its policies in areas that are crucial to scholars. We are determined to restore full confidence . . . by taking steps to ensure that the faculty's policies are widely understood and followed."

The report finds Safran violated Harvard guidelines in not initially disclosing the CIA financing

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of the conference to the university or to its participants, and for "not channelling the contract through the university, which was clearly . . . a sponsor." Safran acknowledged the funding only after news media inquiries.

The report, however, concludes that Safran acted properly in reporting the book contract to Harvard one week after he signed it even though it contained two provisions that may have violated Harvard's guidelines for sponsored research.

Those provisions gave the CIA the right of prepublication review of the work and stipulated that the CIA not be disclosed as a fund source, according to the report.

Harvard guidelines do not prohibit CIA sponsorship of research but require full disclosure of the source of research funds. Spence notes that those guidelines are designed to ensure "freedom to publish without external restriction, the independence and objectivity of scholarship, and the freedom of scholars to disclose their external sources of research support."

Spence wrote that the university was at fault for knowing about the clauses but not acting sooner. The report noted that Safran "disclosed the . . . full text of the CIA contract in a letter to the dean of the faculty of arts and sciences" and called attention to the "potentially controversial elements of the contract."

Safran "cannot be held responsible for the faculty's failure to conduct a complete review," the report said.

The dean of the faculty at the time was Henry Rosovsky, now a member of the Harvard Corporation.

The report, culminating a three-month investigation, is scheduled to be released tomorrow. Spence did not return phone calls yesterday and had previously declined comment until his office releases the report.

Safran could not be reached. On Friday, Safran declined to discuss the matter until Harvard officially releases the report. He noted, however, that he had said all along that he had told the "appropriate authorities" of the 1982 contract. He has also said that the book was conceived by him and

that its text was unchanged by the agency.

The Spence report says Safran indicated that he "would prefer to step down" as director at the end of the academic year "and has also expressed . . . his profound regret for the effects the disclosure problem has had on the center."

Accepting the resignation "with sadness and deep reservation," Spence praises Safran as a "distinguished scholar" whose "erudition and objectivity as a scholar have not been questioned . . . despite the controversy." The report also lauds Safran's "energy" in building up research activity at the center. Safran will remain as a tenured professor.

In addition, Spence says three members of the executive committee that governs the Center on Middle Eastern Studies called publicly for Safran's resignation "without consulting their colleagues and before a review had been launched."

The report announces that Spence is disbanding the six-member executive committee, which had included Safran, and says the standing committee of the faculty on Middle Eastern studies "will take a much more active role in oversight of the Center and its policies."

The six-page report says the standing committee "should consider whether, given the particular circumstances of the center, intelligence agency grants . . . should be used for research."

The controversy over Safran's handling of the two CIA contracts stirred a debate throughout the field of Middle Eastern studies. Last month, a national association of his scholarly colleagues passed a resolution "deploring" Safran's actions.

A number of scholars expressed concern about the effect the matter would have on the work and the security of the center and other American scholars working in the Middle East. In Kuwait, a member of the parliament last month urged Kuwait to investigate all of its links to Harvard and any Kuwaiti students who

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had studied there.

Spence's report confirms his preliminary findings, announced Oct. 18, that Safran erred in interpreting the \$45,000 CIA grant for the conference as a personal one and in not notifying the participants of it until ordered to do so just before the session began. Spence permitted the conference to go on but announced he would conduct a "thorough" investigation into Safran's use of the CIA funds and whether Harvard's policies on sponsored research are "adequate to protect academic freedom . . . at Harvard."

One critic of Safran's actions, who was consulted by Spence on aspects of the report but had not seen the final document, expressed disappointment yesterday, saying it dwelled too much on the technical issue of Safran's compliance with university guidelines, and not enough on the larger issue of whether scholars in such politically sensitive fields as Middle Eastern studies should accept funds from intelligence agencies.

"Where is the ethics of all this being addressed?" asked Richard N. Frye, a member of the executive committee that Spence disbanded. "The real nub is the moral issue, the way Safran dealt with colleagues and students.

Frye, one of those who publicly urged Safran's resignation, called the findings of the report a "whitewash with one concession - that Safran will go at the end of the academic year. . . I hear no criticism, morally, of what he did."